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# THE GORDIAN KNOT IN MACEDONIA.

BY STEPHEN BONSAI.

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THE ghastly state of affairs in Macedonia, which has at last fastened the attention of the civilized world, is difficult to understand in the light of the conflicting reports, and yet more difficult to explain. However, it is certain that the area of savage warfare is rapidly increasing and that it is the scene of a warfare only possible to men enslaved by racial hatred and religious fanaticism. To-day, all Southeastern Europe is concerned; to-morrow, so far-reaching are the interests involved, the war may become world-wide. But who at this late day would cast the horoscope of the Eastern Question?

“Why do not the people of Macedonia leave off killing one another and burning each other’s houses, and do what’s right?” was the complaint made in my hearing a few days ago by a statesman who has made history in the Western World. This inquiry at least is not difficult to answer. The Christian Slavs and the Moslem Turks and the other ethnical flotsam and jetsam to be found in Macedonia are doing, one and all, what they firmly believe to be right. The Christians point to Joshua, the Turks to Mohammed. If they could only be inoculated with the virus of the modern disease of scepticism, and leave off so fervently doing right according to their own consciences, there might be peace in the Balkans, and certainly the population would increase. The present war of extermination which does not permit of description is inspired by the spiritual advisers of the unfortunate contestants, and full warrant for it is to be found in scriptures which are regarded by both sides as Holy Writ.

The present troubles are not new and their causes are far to seek. They all go back to that dark day for Southeastern Europe, some 500 years ago, when, as the epic of the Slav race tells

us with Homeric beauty, the Sultan Murad and the Ottoman Turks triumphed over King Lazar and his mighty men on the dark field of Kossova—one of the few decisive battle-grounds, and one which can be easily visited to-day by means of Baron Hirsch's circuitous, but civilizing, railway, in the heart of the disturbed vilayets. However, it is only proposed here to take up the Macedonian question from the treaty of San Stefano in 1878, when it entered upon its present phase. In negotiating this treaty, so memorable, although many of its provisions were afterwards nullified, General Ignatieff, who had perhaps done more than any other one man to bring about the Russo-Turkish war, to liberate the little brothers, the Southern Slavs, who had suffered so long and so much at the hands of Turkish tyranny and Moslem fanaticism, secured not only the practical independence of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia, which till then had been Turkish provinces, but also the independence and the union of that Greater Bulgaria, (the realization of his political dream), which included not only the provinces mentioned, but those districts of European Turkey known to-day as the Vilayets of Old Servia and of Kossova and something more—territory which to-day is known generally but incorrectly as Macedonia.

There was much to be said in favor of Ignatieff's plan, although, or possibly because, it entailed the practical dismemberment of Turkey in Europe. In the light of subsequent events, it is clear it would have been well for the peace of the world had his plan not been vetoed by Austria and by Great Britain.

As is well known, the negotiations that had taken place at San Stefano between the victorious Russian and the conquered Turk, were reopened at the Congress of the Powers in Berlin, a few months later, with very different results. At San Stefano the Turks were beaten to a standstill, and the invading army was within fifteen miles of that Holy of Holies (throughout the Slav world), the Mosque of St. Sophia. There was no force in sight, upon land at least, to keep the Russians out of Stamboul—nothing to prevent them, if they but persisted, from driving the dervishes out of the shrine, and making it a Christian church again; and this had been one of the most resounding and persistent battle-cries of the War of Liberation. The Turks beaten made every possible concession to save their capital. Those concessions, which had reference to the Macedonian question, were,

as I have stated, the practical freedom of Bulgaria, under a Christian prince, and the carving out of a Greater Bulgaria from those districts of Turkey which are called, somewhat loosely, Macedonia.

Of course, these changes entailed a complete readjustment of political power and of position in the Balkans, and indeed throughout Southeastern Europe; and it was rather in the light of the political advantages that by them, it was thought, would accrue to Russia, than with a desire for the welfare of the Christians, that these clauses of the San Stefano Treaty were reviewed by the Congress of Berlin. In the months that intervened between the signing of the treaty within sight of Constantinople and the meeting of the Congress of the Powers in Berlin, a great many things had happened; and, what was more important, a great many things which had happened became known, and were appreciated. The most important of these disclosures, in its bearings upon the councils of Europe and the protocols before the Congress, was the knowledge that Russia had been "bled white," to use a Bismarckian expression, in the Turkish war, and that the Great White Tzar, when he presented himself through his representatives at the German capital was, *vis-à-vis* to the coalition of the Western Powers, well-nigh as helpless as the Turks had been at San Stefano. This condition of affairs could have but one result, and Russia was robbed of the fruits of her victory by the influence of Austria and Great Britain. Ignatieff's dream of a Greater Bulgaria came to naught, and the Christian inhabitants of what we call Macedonia were handed over again to the tender mercies of the Turks. Of course, the Padishah promised reforms, and it was stated that the government of the Christians would in the future be so just and equitable as to give no cause for complaint. How impossible it was to carry out this promise should appear even from the short account of the religious and racial conditions prevailing in Macedonia which follows.

The fact is that Macedonia presents a political and administrative problem of the highest order. And, further, so far as I know, no man properly equipped and conversant with the languages, the history and the idiosyncrasies of the peoples of Southeastern Europe has entered upon a study of the many confusing phases of the problem with anything like a dispassionate mind. I feel justified in saying that every description of Macedonia that

has been written in the last twenty years is either a campaign document, or merely the diary of a journey by some traveller from Western Europe—sometimes, it is true, written without prejudice, but always superficially.

I have spent some months in this perplexing country, have crossed again and again the length and the breadth of it on horseback, the only way one can do so, from Priserend to Prishtina, and from Scopia to Okrida and Monastir; and I have talked directly or through more or less reliable interpreters with the people of all nationalities and classes, but I would not venture to say where the Slavs or the Greeks or the Roumeliotes or the Albanians are in the majority, or to answer the moot question whether the Slavs who are met with belong to the Bulgarian or to the Servian family of that race, or whether it is for the protection and the blessing of the Patriarch of the Greek Church or of the Exarch of the Bulgarian Church that the Christians are yearning. However, without presuming to speak with authority, some idea may be given of the ethnical odds and ends and of the Church waifs and fragments encountered by the traveller in this distressful country.

There is at least one thing that can be said, without fear of contradiction, of travel in Macedonia. Nowhere else in the world does the polyglot have such an opportunity for drawing upon his resources of language. Within a radius of ten miles you will find as many languages spoken. The traveller you may meet by the way will speak to you in the language he has received from his forefathers, but in no other. Nothing is more remarkable than the tenacity with which all the groups refuse to pollute their lips with the crooked words of their immediate neighbors, with whom it would appear that they have been living on a Killenny-cat basis from the beginning of the ages. One of the strangest of your surprises is to learn that all the horse-dealers and jobbers with whom the traveller, and especially the correspondent, must come in daily, and not always pleasant, contact are Spanish Jews, who have been living in this secluded corner of the globe ever since their expulsion from the Iberian Peninsula. They know a great deal about horses, and are said to be sharper in a horse deal than the Gypsies. If you can make your arrangements with them in the language of Cervantes, a quaint version of which is their household speech, it will delight them greatly, and

you are apt to get the best horse in the stable. There are also a number of Levantine Italians peddling in the interior, and fishing along the Albanian coast, engaged very much as you find them in the Caribbean and South-American waters. So far as I know, their presence is the only justification for the close attention with which the Italian Government is following the developments in Macedonia, unless it be that the King, Victor Emanuel, by his marriage with the beautiful Montenegrin princess, considers himself thereby involved in the family quarrel of the Slavs.

There are Greeks, of course, both in Macedonia and in Thessaly, though I met by no means so great a number of them as have other travellers, with whose relative impartiality I have been impressed. They are more numerous in the towns than in the country. They have many showy and many charming qualities, but they lack the sturdiness as well as the stolidity of the Bulgarian Slavs, whom they call "oxen" in contempt. It was, in part, to rescue these submerged brethren, that the unhappy people of Greece were driven into the war of 1897. A very large number of the troops that had no difficulty in sending the disorganized Greeks sprinting back to Larissa, especially those in the army of Edhem Pasha, so long the military governor of Macedonia, were recruited in that country, which fact would go to prove to any one but an incorrigible member of the Slav Revolutionary Committees, that there are quite a few Turks, or at least Mohammedans, left in Macedonia, and that their fighting qualities are unimpaired. It cannot be denied, though it is a fact which the Slav agitators do not dwell upon, that the Mohammedan population of the Macedonian vilayets has largely increased during the last twenty years. Some attempt has been made by the Sultan to bring colonists from his Asiatic dominions, but the greater part of the increase is due to the advent of peasants and small farmers from Bulgaria, Roumelia, Bosnia, and the other provinces which have been taken from the Turk. These refugees are generally animated by the most fierce hatred of the Christians with whom they have been living for years in unpleasant proximity, and by whom, it is certain, they have often been treated with great unfairness. The estimate usually given, that four-fifths of the people of Macedonia are Christians, is, perhaps only in view of this recent immigration, considerably exaggerated. Another fraction of the

Macedonian population is formed by the Roumeliotes, locally Zinzares, of undoubted Latin stock. They speak much the same language as the Roumanians, and they, too, claim descent from the colonies and legions of the Roman Empire that were engulfed by the invading barbarians. They hate both the Slavs and the Turks, impartially betraying each in turn, as serves their purpose best. They look forward to the day when they will come into their own again, and, in the mean time, they turn to Bucharest for light and leading. There they are encouraged in all their trouble-making proclivities; not that it is at all likely that King Charles hopes to claim them as his own on the day of final settlement in the Balkans. Doubtless their agitation is fostered for "trading purposes," and in the end they will be relinquished for people of Roumanian stock nearer to the present confines of the kingdom on the Danube.

When it comes to the larger factors in the war of races, I shall have to speak with greater reserve, the elements of the Macedonian mosaic not admitting of that concise, clean-cut description which is so pleasing to the reader. In the districts of Kossova and of Old Servia, the population is, as to numbers, of Slav origin, to an overwhelming degree. They speak Slav dialects which, in some districts and communities, show the closest relation with Bulgarian as it is spoken in the Principality to-day; while, in other districts, the resemblance to modern Servian is striking. Taking my own personal experiences for the little they are worth, I must say that the great majority of the Christians I met in Macedonia looked like Bulgars, and said they were of Bulgarian stock. In Albania, especially around Jakova, the Arnaut and Moslem Albanian element is very strong. Here they have the upper hand, which, as recent action shows, is a whip-hand over their Christian neighbors, and without foreign intervention they are apt to keep it. With the exception of the Albanians, all of the pieces in the mosaic—the Bulgaro-Slavs, the Serbo-Slavs, the Greeks, and the Roumeliotes—have during the last decade been engaged with all their energies in coddling a national revival or a tribal renaissance. In putting their patriotic designs into execution, they and their backers from abroad seem to have been impressed with the formula of one of our great politicians, which was to "claim everything." Hence the conflicting colored maps and schedules of population, language spoken, and wealth of the

country, which are unfolded before the intelligent stranger who has come to write up Macedonia. These tables of statistics and picture-writings resemble nothing half so much as the estimated majorities heralded by our campaign prophets, from the opposing camps, before election day. And, unhappily, they, too, suffer from the same structural defect—some of them at least must prove to be incorrect.

These researches into the nationality of the submerged Christian in Macedonia, together with the rivalries of the churches, of the Greek Patriarch and the Bulgarian Exarch, certainly exasperate, if they are not entirely responsible for, the reign of terror which exists. I was standing in the market place of Scopia, with a fervent disciple of Goptchevitch, who had been sent down from Belgrade by the Servian Government that is daily growing more envious of the success of the Bulgarians in reclaiming lost brethren. My enthusiastic friend asked a poor devil who came along, leading a donkey loaded with fagots of wood, what was his nationality. "*Ja sam Bougarin*," ("I am a Bulgarian,") came the reply, to the anger of the Servian propagandist, who was not to be discouraged, however; and I left him explaining to the simple country lout, how he, the teacher, knew from the way in which the peasant pronounced and inflected his words that he was not a Bulgarian, a belief into which he was born, but in reality a Servian. "Howl with the wolves, or you will be eaten up" is a canny Slav proverb, in which great stock is taken in Macedonia. Tenacious in some ways, these people are weak and pliable in others. Half an hour after he met the propagandist, the wood-peddler was convinced that he and his forebears had been Servians from the beginning of time. Incidents such as these have proved to the Slav Revolutionary Committees, those drawing their resources from Belgrade, as well as those which find their inspiration and their sinews of war in Sophia, what political advantages may accrue from having energetic and persuasive emissaries in the disputed districts. You can apparently make anything you please out of the Macedonian, only he must be caught young.

Achmet Ayoub, the last Marshal of the Turkish Empire, who commanded in Macedonia for many years, took a malicious pleasure in telling a story of the people of a district who were perfectly contented and happy until the propagandists came along, and told them that they were Christians and downtrodden; and I



am inclined to believe that the old soldier's anecdote was not without some foundation in fact. It is quite probable that, up to the Russian war for the liberation of the Southern Slavs, the people of Macedonia lost no sleep in wondering to what division or subdivision of the great Slav family they belonged. Now, however, they think and talk of but little else. Certainly, in the songs and sagas that are handed down in Macedonia from father to son and from mother to daughter, there survives perhaps an exaggerated idea of the glory and power of the ancient Slav empire, but these memories were formerly cultivated as sentiments, rather than as a platform or a political force. - Until the awakening suggestion came from the northern Slavs, who were in the enjoyment of comparative freedom and more or less liberal institutions, it is probable that the Slavs of Macedonia had but little appreciation of how unfortunate their lot was, politically. Of course, they were, and had been for ages, simply the slaves, the hewers of wood and the drawers of water, for the Turks. You can tell what their position in the land was, even to-day, by the furtive aspect of their villages, hidden away in the valleys and on the hillsides, inconveniently distant from the highroads, where the Turkish lord and the tax-collector travelled with their robber following. These villages are all alike, the houses made of loose, unmortared stones, piled up one upon another, with many apertures through which the cold wind howls. But the most suggestive thing about these hovels are the doors, which are not much larger than the average entrance to the kennel of a good-sized dog. "Why so small a door?" I inquired. "To keep out the Turkish lord," was the invariable answer.

Quite as many Macedonians as Bulgarians took part in the Emancipation war of 1877, which, they thought, could only end in their liberation from the tyranny of the Turk. Indeed, some irregular troops recruited under Boris Panitza in Macedonia greatly distinguished themselves. The decision of the Berlin Congress, adverse to their claim of independence, or at least autonomy, while a great disappointment, did not crush them, and they immediately began the Revolutionary Propaganda, the results of which are so apparent to-day. Naturally,—in view of its great success in achieving the freedom of Bulgaria in fifteen years, these Revolutionists followed closely the method of Katkoff and the Pan Slavs of Moscow. Young Macedonian boys of

promise were educated in the Bulgarian schools, or in Russia, and then returned to their homes bound by the most solemn pledges to agitate and to teach their neighbors the Gospel of the Pan-Slav.

The proper relations of the Bulgarian Government with this revolutionary movement have always been most difficult to preserve. On the one hand, to maintain popularity at home, and the affection of the Macedonians, it was necessary to support the Revolution; on the other hand, this support had to be so secret as to escape the vigilance of the Turkish authorities, and of the other Powers interested in the maintenance of peace in the Balkans. This difficult course Stambouloff pursued with marked ability during his premiership,—only Boris Panitza fell a victim to his correct attitude. Panitza never could understand the necessity of caution or diplomatic reserve on the part of the Government, and he was forever making incursions into Macedonia at the most inconvenient moments, until finally Stambouloff had him arrested on the charge of high treason, and, after the most summary trial, he was shot.

We now come to the Albanians, who have been taking such a high hand in the recent disturbances, and who are probably the most irreconcilable and certainly the most formidable element in the situation. They live in large numbers in Albania proper along the sea, and are scattered throughout the western districts of Macedonia. "Where the sword is, there is the faith," said the Albanians centuries ago, when, together with the Pomaks of Rhodope, they were suddenly converted by the hard-fighting Turks to the faith of Mohammed. Like most converts, they are very fanatical. Of the origin of their race we know little, and up to the present no chief has appeared to fan the flame of a national revival, nor a meddlesome Power to recognize in them long lost brothers. They are still awaiting the coming of a second Scander Beg. However, they have proved themselves, particularly in guerilla warfare, the best fighting men the Sultan has in his European dominions. Whenever, as now, the question of making further concessions to the Christian populations is raised, the Albanians have ever, as now, shown themselves to be the most uncompromising of the faithful. To-day, their attitude, which approaches open revolt, is a cause of more grave concern to the Porte than the rising of the Christian communities.

Only those who are ignorant of the present condition of his empire and of the history of the Turk since the treaty of 1856, when his dominions and power were recognized and guaranteed anew, can question the correctness of the diagnosis made by the doctors in diplomacy who to-day, with averted gaze, are retiring from the bedside, and leaving the Sick Man of Europe in the hands of the military surgeons. In fifty years or rather less, every half-way measure and compromise that the ingenious brain of the West could devise has been applied to help the Turkish Empire, with all its incongruous elements and irreconcilable antagonisms, to masquerade about, if but for a few months longer, as a "going concern." But to-day all agree that the only possible salvation is to be sought in the knife, and many of the invalid's former friends would bear with Christian resignation a fatal termination of the ordeal. Unhappily, there is not anything like the same unanimity in the councils of Christendom as to who should perform the operation and who present the benevolent anæsthetic. Certainly, it can truthfully be said, that not only every honest ameliorative measure has been essayed and proved without benefit by reason of the idiosyncrasies of the exalted patient, but also that the wardrobe of sham and political humbug, out of which so many cunningly contrived makeshifts have been drawn, is at last empty.

And in one more important detail the situation is simplified—there is not a single Government of those concerned that wishes to give the Turk another chance, as they did with such disastrous results in former days of acute crisis. Even Lord Salisbury recanted with the cynical phrase: "We placed our money on the wrong horse." Although the Bulgaro-Slav revolutionists are endeavoring, by fair means and foul, to force the hand of Europe and compel intervention, the Austro-Russian understanding would still seem to be in control of the course of events. This entente, however, it must be admitted, is a very slender safeguard of peace. As the traditional policy of the Muscovite and the *Drang nach Osten* of the Hapsburg are diametrically opposed and irreconcilable, the understanding can survive only as long as its sphere of action is confined to paper reforms and mere palliatives. Perhaps it will produce some more Christian Vice-Governors, the ludicrous *Moavins* whose acquiescence in every suggestion that came from Stamboul earned for them all the de-

risive epithet of "yes-men." It may be taken as axiomatic, without crediting all the news or one-half of it whether from Christian or Turkish sources, that to-day, wherever the Turkish power predominates, the Christians are being massacred, men, women, and children, and that, where the Christians are strongest, the medallion of slaughter is merely reversed. But, with three hundred and fifty thousand Turkish troops in the province, the places where the Christians can maintain the upper hand must be few and far between.

It is still urged by some who draw back from the surgical treatment of the Gordian knot, that a cessation of anarchy and a relief, however temporary, might be brought about by a joint occupation of the disturbed provinces by Austro-Russian forces. Such an occupation might be possible, though it would strain possibility well-nigh to the breaking point, were it not for the Albanians. It is as sure as anything can be which has not already taken place, that they would not acquiesce in this arrangement. They would themselves resist invasion, and by their influence in the Sultan's palace, where for many years the free Albanians have been his most trusted guards, they might induce the Commander of the Faithful to throw down the gage of battle. And the logic of events would be on their side. The joint occupation of the Macedonian vilayets would mean, sooner or later, but inevitably, the disruption of the Turkish Empire in Europe, and possibly in Asia as well. The chances of the Turks in battle are very considerable, as all military critics are aware; and they are considerably heightened by the fact, which no one will dispute, that the Austro-Russian understanding would be dissolved at the first hostile shot. Another vital concession to the Christians might cost Abdul Hamid his throne, and be the signal for the disintegration of his empire, while a Holy War might consolidate it. It is generally recognized that the Turkish army, as a fighting machine, has become a very important factor in any settlement of the Eastern Question. It should not be forgotten for a moment that something like three-quarters of the annual expenditure of the Turkish Government has of recent years been for the purchase of arms and munitions of war. The world stood amazed at the untutored valor of the soldiers and the genius of the leaders who defended the Shipka passes and the trenches about Plevna. For twenty years, Von der Goltz Pasha and other

distinguished German officers have been at work in developing the Turks' remarkable natural aptitude for things military—with what success Bulgaria, who is being pushed into the ring by her agitators and politicians, aided by what is apparently the inevitable course of events, may shortly furnish an object-lesson.

To-day the question is, and the answer is still hidden in the future, Who will prove the Alexander to this Gordian knot? With one accord the Slavs of Southeastern Europe turn to the Emperor Nicholas, the grandson of Alexander, the Emancipator of serfs and the Liberator of the Bulgarians. "Salvator!" they cry, in the quaint phraseology of their liturgies, as they acclaim him alone worthy to bear the Cross in the war with the Turks. And though the peace-loving Czar hesitates and his advisers point to the splendid ingratitude that was the sole guerdon of their last crusade, and also to the embarrassing situation in the Far East of Asia, there is a force in Russia before which if fully exerted the Great White Czar needs must bend, and that is the sentiment of Pan-Slavism and the feeling of solidarity with those from whom in the darker ages the Russians received their Scriptures and their saints. The Holy War may not only come at the call of the chief priest of Islam and the fanatical *softas* of Stamboul; John of Cronstadt, or some other fervid priest of the north, may proclaim a crusade, to save what is left of the Christian congregation at Philippi to whom St. Paul preached, and to safeguard the Christian churches in Macedonia which sent St. Cyril and Methodius to carry the hope of salvation to Russia.

STEPHEN BONSAI.